

SOME NOTES ON LEAVING THE PARTY

It has been about nine months since I left the Progressive Labor Party. I thought that it would be useful to state some of my reasons for leaving and to share them with members and friends of the Party, so I am contributing this to the Internal Bulletin, and sending a copy to the area leader and my former club leader. I have no interest in building a faction and even less in starting a new party. I simply want to (1) make the record clear, and (2) offer my criticisms of the direction in which the party is currently going.

My reasons for leaving can be divided into three general areas: (1) the Party's policy of denying membership to gay men and women; (2) the Party's attitude toward coalitions and what is generally referred to as "the movement;" (3) the way in which inter-party and intra-party struggle is conducted, as shown by the San Francisco split and the break with the Canadian Party of Labor.

I. THE ISSUE OF HOMOSEXUALITY

At this point, I do not feel that there is much need to debate the substance of the issue for two reasons. First, I generally agree with the thrust of the arguments made in the three articles which were critical of the Party's policy and which refuted the National Steering Committee's position. (These were published in the Pre-Convention Bulletin #1, March 20, 1978.)* Second, I have discussed the substantive issue before, both in articles intended for the Internal Bulletin and in letters to Challenge, but none have been printed. (I was told by an NC member that there were a slew of articles after the NSC statement, but that most would not be printed, since "homosexuality is not the basic issue facing the Party.")

Instead of re-debating the issue, the question for me to answer is: why couldn't I stay in the Party, continue to disagree about this issue, but struggle internally? That is an honest question, and one that I will try to answer as clearly as I can. There are several reasons why the issue appeared to me to be one that indicated leaving the Party:

1. This was the first issue on which I disagreed with the Party which I found impossible to defend the Party's line. I have disagreed before, both when I was around

*Both the NSC statement and the various responses to it are included here as appendix one.

the party, and after I joined it. But I always found it possible to defend the party's line, even when I disagreed with it, because I respected the process and the reasons why the party made its decision. For example, I thought that it was wrong for the Campus Worker-Student Alliance to be the main thrust of SDS in 1970. But I respected the argument that we had to make a real, rather than a symbolic, alliance, and that campus workers were the best place to start. (I thought then, and still think, that CWSA was a good program as part of an SDS chapters work, but that it was far too narrow as a main thrust.) Nevertheless, I could defend it because I understood and respected the reasoning and the concerns which led to the program.

Similarly, I could (and did) defend both the support for and, later, the opposition to, and, still later, the support for, black studies and open admissions, because I understood and respected the motivation and the arguments behind those positions. And, of course, I believed that it was important to have an organization which spoke with one voice on these questions.

But there is nothing in the NSC statement which I can defend since the NSC attitude toward homosexuals is not based on science or anything but bigotry. And in discussions with people who support the NSC statement, the bigotry which is implicit in the NSC statement comes roaring out explicitly.

Hence, the statement is indefensible, at least by me. I can not use any arguments, because there are no arguments. It is like trying to defend Chinese foreign policy.

2. Probably the logical weakness of the NSC statement would not bother me, except that I know, admire, and respect a number of homosexual women in my neighborhood. The notion that their homosexuality per se disqualifies them from membership in PLP is ludicrous to me and would be to anyone who knew them. This is not to say that if PLP admitted homosexuals, they would rush to join; it is to say that their being women who love women has nothing to do with whether they could be won to Communism.
3. The decision to leave over the issue has to do with how it is handled. Letters critical of the policy barring homosexuals as members are written to Challenge and to the bulletin. Some are printed, some are not. Then the NSC issues a statement. It is hardly a definitive statement. Those who agree with it say that it could be better; those who disagree offer cogent arguments.

Three letters are printed criticizing the statement; one letter is printed criticizing those who criticize the statement. Nothing more is said, either in Internal Bulletins or at the national convention. There is this enormous difference over one of the most fundamental issues facing a communist party--requirements of membership--and there is no further discussion of it. (Those who do not think that membership requirements are important issues for a communist party might recall that this was the issue that divided the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks originally.) The NSC statement is allowed to stand, and no provision is made for resolving the issue.

Given this procedure, there would be little point to remain in the party and struggle over the question. (Incidentally, when I joined the Party, I indicated my disagreement on this question. I was told that there was disagreement within the Party, that there might be a re-evaluation, and, in any case, I should join and struggle for my point of view inside. But how to struggle? By writing unprinted Internal Bulletin articles?)

II. THE ISSUE OF COALITIONS, OR PLP'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MASS, GENERALLY REVISIONIST-LED, MOVEMENT

I can remember the precise moment that I decided to leave the party.

I was at a demonstration called by a coalition which was fighting against cutbacks in social services. I said to be party leader, "We should discuss how to work in coalitions like this." She replied, "No we shouldn't." At that point, I realized that there were fundamental differences between my outlook and that of the party leadership. What I had thought were tactical differences, or tactlessness, was instead the result of a political outlook which I did not share. Until that moment, I thought that I was in basic agreement with the party, while disagreeing with this or that tactic or strategy, or being too uncommitted to do this or that task.

What I want to do is discuss the differences between my outlook and that of the dominant trend in PLP now in a way that will be understandable to the party as a whole, to people in Kansas City, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and so on, and not just in L.A. So the example should not be the coalition I have just described, since that (1) is a

local matter and (2) much of it would involve me telling other people's positions.

The best way and, in fact, the only way which would be useful, would be to discuss this trend in the party using party documents and quoting from written statements by people who exemplify and agree with this trend. That way it will be possible for people to read the whole statement from which my quotations are taken, decide for themselves whether I am summing up the position fairly, and they can evaluate my criticisms fairly, without getting into the specifics of a single event (which, as I know from discussions over the years, can get fairly gossipy). This way of discussing the differences was suggested by my club leader. Her argument, which I agree with now, was that what is at stake is a basic political difference, and that discussion of basic political differences strengthens the party while personal disagreements weaken it.

One of the best indicators of what I oppose in PL's practice appeared in an internal bulletin: "'Nice Ways of Doing Things' Vs. Washing Down Racist Filth."* (Pre-Convention Bulletin #1, March 20, 1978, pages 92-95. This article was not an official document, but it was written by a leader in the Party (at least, it seemed that way from reading it). It was criticized in a subsequent bulletin, but the criticism drew no connections between the errors of the article and the current line of the party.

It is difficult to know where to begin in my criticism, but the first thing I want to do is indicate how the approach in this article is different from the party's earlier approach (the approach which won me close to PL).

1. The assessment of Science for the People (SftP) has already been criticized as one-sided. But let's look at it closely. There are only two specific criticisms made of SftP: first, that SftP has "debated the racists," and second, that they tried "to keep us from being too militant." In other words, they disagreed with our tactics at the convention.

Anyone who has been involved with PLP knows that a lot of good people disagree with our tactics and that we ourselves debate them. There was, the article indicates, disagreements over those tactics within CAR and PLP. It is the height of sectarianism to define those who disagree with us tactically as the enemy.

*The complete text of the article appears here as Appendix II.

But what about their "crime" of debating the fascists? (It is not clear, by the way, just who SftP debated or challenged to a debate.) Is that a ruling class strategy? Perhaps, but when I look on my bookshelf at Progressive Labor Magazine, Vol. 9, no. 1, April, 1973, pages 56-66, I find an article entitled "Communist Doctor Debates Racist Beast of Willowbrook." We were not ashamed of having that debate; this article was featured on the cover of the magazine. Under our leadership, SDS challenged Herrnstein to a debate. Throughout the anti-war movement, we always tried to force the ruling class spokespeople to debate; usually, they stayed away from debates. This was a sensible move on their part, since they controlled the newspapers, television, and so forth, and could get their message conveyed in other ways.

I am not arguing in favor of debates as a tactic. I am arguing against elevating the tactical debate over debating to a principled question. When you do that, you are led into absurd positions like attacking SftP for doing what PLP has done.

2. The dowsing Wilson with water incident is another example of elevating tactics to principles. First, under the heading of weaknesses is that a CAR member said that "he didn't think that we should have poured water on Wilson because this made it a personal attack on him. Of course it was a personal attack on this racist sexist pig. That was the point."

In other words, the expressing of an opinion by a CAR leader in opposition to a tactic is described as a weakness of the convention! How is this a weakness? Moreover, how does the dowsing compare to our ideas in the past about political activities? This sort of tactic was popular in the early "resistance" days of SDS, as when demonstrators threw steer's blood over people attending a dinner for Dean Rusk:

The "resistance" strategy is not concerned with action geared to winning over most students. . . . If a person does not already oppose something, urinating on it will not produce opposition. If I support an institution and you throw a stink bomb at it, I'll be mad at you, not it. . . .

The strategy of resistance substitutes a small group of radicals for the masses of people."
"Bravery Is Not Enough," Boston PL News. (1967)
Is there anything wrong with this criticism of resistance? Doesn't it apply to a lot of our work lately?

3. Method of resolving differences: there was a dispute over the heading for the statement. One person wanted "Statement on Sociobiology"; another wanted "CAR Says Smash Racist Wilson". How was it resolved: "we changed this Tues. nite after he left."

But rather than go into detail about specifics in the article, I would like to contrast the attitude toward SftP with the attitude PLP took toward SDS in the 1960s. In SDS, PLP joined the organization and put forward a vision of what SDS should be: a mass, anti-racist, anti-imperialist, pro-working class, multi-racial organization. And the work within SDS was not only building and recruiting for PLP, but also building SDS into that kind of organization and putting forward programs and policies which would create that kind of organization. In fact, it was PLP which created the strategic mix which dominated the student movement. Before PLP's influence, there were two trends in the student movement: (1) a student power, organize around dorm rules, wing, and a (2) reformist, anti-war anti-racist wing. The weakness of the student power wing was that it was concerned with trivial issues; its strength was that it involved students in struggle against the administration to some extent. The weakness of the anti-war wing, was that it advocated peaceful parades with liberal senators, and allied itself with the liberal wing of the democratic party and with university administrators. PLP brought a whole new perspective to the student movement which made a breakthrough possible:

fighting against the manifestations and support given to the war and racism on the campus. This involved students in sharp struggles against administrations, gave us the opportunity to educate hundreds of thousands of students about the war and racism, and to concretely hurt the ruling class.

What PLP did in the student movement was to organize around a program which it created for the movement as a whole. To relate this to SftP: PLP members should join it and work out a program for scientific workers and students with a perspective toward winning the whole organization to that program and winning some of the members to the party itself.

Whether or not that is feasible or not, the ideological position which stops us from either doing that, or building CAR as a mass organization, was advanced by the NC in the course of the struggle against the San Francisco group: "the left itself is broad." This slogan, which I thought sounded pretty good, actually means that the party no longer seeks to build a left-center coalition. This is an enormous strategic change, one which I never understand before. Once I understood that, I understood why CAR ignored the demonstration of 400 people against the Davis cup on Saturday to hold its own demonstration of 35 people Sunday. The party no longer is trying to lead the movement through a left-center coalition. Instead, the left is to stand alone.

To sum up: what is it about the article that I disagree with? And why do I think it reflects the line of the party? (1) The way SftP is dismissed as totally revisionist solely because of tactical questions, that is, solely because they used tactics which PLP used to use. (2) The dramatic, go-it-alone tactics which do not educate or build support except among those who already agree totally with us. (3) The idea behind all of this: that the left itself is broad, and that there is no need for a left-center coalition. (The statement "the left is broad" appeared first, I think, in the "Report from January N.C. on United Front Work." To be fair, at no place in that report is it said that the left-center coalition is being abandoned, but that is the only implication which I think can be drawn from the phrase itself and the political practice which it has engendered.)

III. HOW INTER AND INTRAPARTY STRUGGLE IS CONDUCTED.

In a recent internal bulletin noting Enver Hoxha's criticisms of the Chinese CP, it is asked: what evidence is there that rank and file party members in Albania are criticizing their party's practice in opposition to the line of the leadership? Is that sort of criticism encouraged? Well, what evidence is there that this process is going on in Progressive Labor Party?

A. The Polemics with the Canadian Party of Labor

As it became clear that there were strong differences between the CPL and PLP, it was also clear that there would be no serious discussion of those differences within PLP. At no time were members of PL given a chance to read a statement from the CPL; we were instead given excerpts or statements selected by PLP leaders in order to discredit the CPL. Articles were not printed under their original titles, but under headings like "Here's How the CPL Changed Its Line."

What should have been done instead? A real political struggle between fraternal parties would have been handled something like this: leaders of the CPL and PLP would have agreed jointly on what articles represented their positions, and those articles would be published in English, French, and Spanish in a special bulletin to be distributed to the rank and file of both parties. The membership of PLP would take the CPL ideas seriously and re-examine our practice and theory in line with their criticisms, just as we would expect CPL to take PLP's criticisms and ideas seriously and to re-examine CPL practice in line with our criticisms.

B. The Struggle Against the San Francisco Group

Throughout this struggle, at no time did anyone who supported the leadership admit that there was anything true in the criticisms made by the San Francisco group. Instead, the line was that we all had to purge ourselves of any similar ideas. It was said that the emergence of this ideological struggle was a positive thing, but why was it positive. Was it positive because the comrades in San Francisco, party members and leaders of long standing, had raised important points which, while drawing wrong conclusions, still had some validity from which we could learn? No. Here is why it is good:

This internal struggle of two lines is good, and inevitable. ... The ideas of these forces represented ideas held by many good comrades in the Party, and therefore the ensuing sharp internal struggle served to cleanse the Party of these ideas and enable it to make leaps forward. (This is from an undated, orange leaflet issued by an expanded NSC and entitled "Smash the right-wing trend! Build the Party!")

In other words, the emergence of the debate is good not because the comrades have anything positive to offer, but because they can be used as a horrible example to intimidate others who hold somewhat similar views. From the outset, the point is not to listen and to learn, but to cleanse the party from these ideas. Instead of

Thesis

Antithesis

Synthesis

we have thesis, antithesis, and the same thesis said louder and stronger.

I have just looked over the San Francisco statements. Much of what they said is, in my opinion, wrong. The charge of racism was totally unfounded; the position on the US/USSR seems to me to ignore the dramatic shift in world power in the past decade; and so on. But the San Franciscans point to serious weaknesses in our work. Around CAR, for example, they have noted that CAR has not been built as a mass organization. Their solution (abandon CAR for a defense committee) was not particularly good, but a real discussion would begin by admitting the party's weakness in building left-center organizations, and then brainstorm about the ways to overcome this weakness. What emerged from the struggle, however, was the opposite: the notion that the left is broad itself, and that there was really no need for a left-center coalition.

What these two struggles meant for me was the realization that the party was not going to learn through struggle, that instead positions would simply harden.

IV. MY CURRENT ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PARTY

At this point, my attitude toward the party is somewhat ambivalent. I think that the direction is wrong, and I think that the likelihood of an internal struggle against that direction is not very great. At the same time, I still have a lot of respect for the Party, both for its role in the past, which has taught me so much, and for its current activities. When the Ku Klux Klan held a rally in Oxnard, some 60 miles north of Los Angeles, none of the numerous Los Angeles groups and grouplets came to Oxnard except for PLP and CAR. I plan to keep working with the party in those activities with which I agree. I am glad that friends of mine in the party have remained friends, and that people are still accepting the contributions which I feel ready to make. In fact, even after leaving the Party, people have struggled with me to write articles for the magazine on Communist labor activity. I still plan to do that, and to work on some films which reflect the Party's line.

I am not urging people to leave the Party. I do urge people to consider the Party's current direction, to re-examine the work done under the old theory of the Left-Center coalition (which I think was overwhelmingly positive), to repudiate the slogan that the "Left is broad", as well as the statement that "no movement has ever been destroyed by leftist errors", and to return to the style of work that characterized the party in earlier years. That kind of work needs to be done, and no other group is going to carry it out.

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April 10, 1979

On the Party's Line on Homosexuality

The problem with this letter on why the Party should recruit homosexuals is that it fails to address the central question of homosexuality squarely. Basically, there is only one question involved: is the development of homosexuality a positive or negative development for the working class? We think it is a negative development, logical to the decline of capitalism.

The working class is the only class with a future. And this future must be assured not only by winning millions of workers in fighting for Socialism, but also by guaranteeing the consolidation of working-class power under Socialism, and eventually developing a communist society. As a trend, homosexuality closes off this type of outlook. It closes off proletarian family life as we conceive of it. Nor do we want a "test-tube" society. We don't want relationships based simply on reproduction. Homosexuality basically denies the future. And in that sense it reflects the demise of capitalism. Capitalism has no future!

Capitalism, among many things, breeds individualism. "Do your own thing" is the capitalist cliché that symbolizes individualism. The Party leadership has long taken the position that homosexuality is a bad development for the working class because it is the antithesis of a positive outlook. And, unlike other deviations of a political character, most homosexuals deny that it is a bad thing. Therefore, they close off struggle against it. But, in the Party now, and in the future under Socialism, our Party will not accept the idea of "do your own thing."

Consequently, our Party takes the position that what is bad for the working class must be opposed. Unless this position is reversed, we feel homosexuality is a negative trend amongst the working class. But, since this previous letter implies that homosexuality is alright--and thus primarily a matter of individual concern and choice--there is no possible struggle against it, as with other errors.

We do not feel that a negative trend amongst the working class should result in Party membership. And for every bigot like Bryant who condemns homosexuality from their class point of view, ten times as many bosses--especially the main wing of the ruling class--say it's O.K. As a matter of fact, Carter supported various demands of homosexuals. This, therefore, doesn't make the writer of the letter in league with Carter. It just means that at this stage of history, for various reasons, the main sections of the ruling class and their medical community do not consider homosexuality bad.

Any derogatory language or action by party members relative to homosexuals is bad. Homosexuals are not the enemy of the working class or of the Party. Many homosexuals can be won to be allies of the working class and of the Party. But, the fact is that anti-homosexuality is not the same as racism, male chauvinism or other forms of oppression. We cannot equate bias against homosexuals with serious attacks on the working class.

Unfortunately, in the Party and in its base there is much subjectivity on this question. "Homophobia" is not a problem in the Party. The problem in the Party is right-opportunism. This is reflected in many ways. As indicated, one way is the proposition that, "As long as I can help the Party and the working class, I can be a member." This places the question in a narrow, personal context, and not within a class framework, of whether or not our Party should O.K., justify or encourage homosexuality. We think it shouldn't. We think that anyone who will not be open to struggle on any question because of "my own belief" should not be a Party member.

--National Steering Committee

This statement was written as a reply to the article "Homosexuals Should Be Recruited to the Party" which follows it. The next three articles were all written as a response to this statement. I apologize for the underlining. It was not done to underscore points for readers now, but rather was done when I first read the articles some time ago. If I had a copy without underlining I would have used it, but I do not. The same is true of underlining on the following article.

Homosexuals Should Be Recruited to the Party

The Party now has an unstated policy which forbids the recruitment of any homosexual. This policy denies the Party the opportunity to win many good fighters; the present policy prevents the Party from leading struggles against reactionary chauvinists like Anita Bryant's fascist grouplet. The exclusion of homosexuals represents a concession to the sexist propaganda of the ruling class, which says we should be grateful because we are better off than the faggots (encouraging workers to put their energies into keeping homosexuals down, rather than uniting to fight the ruling class).

The bosses use many weapons in their battle to maintain their rule over the working class. As our Party has consistently pointed out, one of the bosses' most important tools has been to divide the workers; to persuade workers that the problem lies with another group of workers, not with the capitalist system. The ruling class promotes every sort of imaginable division among the proletariat: citizen vs. immigrant, Christian vs. Jew, Protestant vs. Catholic, black vs. white -- and heterosexual vs. homosexual.

Our Party must take the lead in rejecting these divisions. The campaign against "homophobia" (fear or hatred of homosexuals) is in the interests of all workers. Whenever the bosses can divide the workers and get them to fighting each other, they have won a big victory. The only way that any workers can win in the long run is through workers' unity; when we allow racism or sexism to divide workers, we are betraying the workers' interests. We will win advanced workers to communist ideas only if we are in the vanguard of struggles against all forms of racism and sexism. If we cave into the prejudices of the bourgeoisie, then we can't expect to win respect from many advanced workers.

Our ability to win workers to communist ideas is seriously weakened when Party members display prejudice and mouth disgusting derogatory comments. We did not go to Washington on Carter's inaugural to "show those faggot liberals a lesson they won't forget", as was said at a NY Party forum -- we went to attack all liberals, no matter what their sexual orientation. At a Boston demonstration, a Party leader said, "ROAR is composed of police agents and homosexuals." Besides being inaccurate (ROAR has beaten up patrons at several gay bars and is very 'pro-family' in the sexist sense), this statement implies that homosexuals are enemies of the working class -- which is sexist nonsense. I could give many more examples of 'homophobia' in the Party. What they reflect is a reactionary attitude ("we are better than those fags") which says that the enemy is homosexuality not the ruling class.

The principal reasons offered to justify the policy banning homosexuals are that homosexuals are inherently unstable as well as probably sexist, a security risk, and uninterested in family life. The Party clearly must require that members lead a stable family lifestyle. A revolutionary communist party can not be based on lumpens who can't hold a steady job or on people who spend their lives chasing after sexual excitement. We need to form organizations with our fellow workers, including social friendships. We need to build lasting and meaningful interpersonal relationships to overcome the isolation capitalism forces upon us and to give us the emotional and personal strength to carry on a life-long struggle.

These are all criteria that must be used to evaluate any potential recruit to the Party, be they heterosexual or homosexual. There are simply no scientific reasons to announce by fiat that homosexuals could never meet the Party's standards. Some people might argue that few homosexuals would be eligible for Party membership (because the pressure society puts on homosexuals makes them unstable). I strongly doubt this; there are after all millions of homosexuals in the U.S., most of them workers who could be won to communist ideas. If there are any homosexuals who would be an asset to the Party, then they should be recruited. There is no sound reason for a ban on homosexuals in the Party; the ban is an accommodation to the sexist stereotypes of bourgeois society.

It may seem that the question of allowing homosexuals into the Party is such a minor question and is so controversial that it would be better to sidestep the whole issue. This would be a serious mistake. Our Party is a vanguard Party -- it must point the way to the working class, even when that way is controversial and unpopular. To cave into the prejudices which the bourgeoisie has drummed into the proletariat is a mistake; it is opportunism. We must be capable of discussing questions scientifically. In particular, our science, Marxism-Leninism, teaches us to evaluate our theories based on our experiences. Party members should ask themselves: do I know of any homosexuals who are potential recruits to the Party? Obviously we may know homosexuals who would be very inappropriate for the Party, but that is also true for many heterosexuals we may know. If the answer is yes, then this brings into question the accuracy of the Party's current position.

There is another reason why our Party must address the question of homosexuality. With the move towards fascism, there are increasing sexist attacks on the working class. Most of these are aimed at women, but some at homosexuals. In 1976, the Supreme Court upheld laws making homosexual acts into crimes. Then in 1977 along came Anita Bryant with a full-blow fascist movement in Florida. The "Save Our Children" campaign rallied bigots and reactionaries of all sorts; it was well designed to terrorize homosexual workers, who can now be legally fired for the mere fact of being homosexual. Bryant took aim at Miami teachers; her talk about a 'plague of homosexuality' among teachers is a good way to poison any teacher-parent alliance. The bourgeoisie gave Bryant incredible publicity; now she is speaking all over the country (at \$5,000 a lecture) plus she has a nationwide TV talk show.

Bryant is living proof of the reactionary nature of anti-homosexual attitudes. Our party can become stronger through leading struggles against this sexist nonsense, just as the Party has grown by taking the lead in attacking the KKK and the Nazis. Instead the Party has isolated itself from homosexual workers and from other workers who see that it is in their interest to overcome the bosses' propaganda about homosexuals. The Party should take the principled stand: homosexuals shall be recruited to the Party on the same basis as anyone else.

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Internal on the Party's Line
on Homosexuality

I oppose the Party's line on homosexuality.

The biggest problem with the National Steering Committee's statement on homosexuality in the Nov. 23 Internal Bulletin is that the NSC offers little or no evidence for many of their major statements.

I will try to summarize the NSC's position.

The NSC seems to say essentially five things: 1) the working class is the only class with a future, and the future must be guaranteed by fighting for socialism, consolidating working class power under socialism, and eventually developing a communist society; 2) a socialist or communist future depends at least in part on the continuation of "proletarian family life as we conceive of it" (paragraph 2 of the NSC statement); 3) "proletarian family life" includes, as an essential and integral element, having children (the NSC does not say this directly, but I think one can reasonably infer it from other remarks in the statement); 4) people choose to be homosexual because of bourgeois individualism; 5) because having children is essential to guaranteeing the future of "proletarian family life", and because people who choose to be exclusively homosexual will not ~~produce children~~ produce children and therefore will not take part in an essential element of guaranteeing the future of "proletarian family life" and the working class--therefore this particular expression of bourgeois individualism cannot be tolerated within the Party, or any communist movement. (The implication follows from this, though the NSC does not directly say it, that individualism by anyone on the question of having children cannot be tolerated, and therefore all communists have an obligation to have children.)

My disagreements are several, and they extend beyond the specific question of homosexuality, and cover the entire scope of what the NSC calls "proletarian family life as we conceive of it."

First let me say: my comments here are in no way intended to support bourgeois "gay rights" movements. Such movements are just another form of nationalism and divide the working class. Nor do I intend to defend any forms of degenerate or Lumpen behavior. I speak here only of the form of human relationship known as homosexuality.

Above I listed five points in the NSC statement. I will address each of the points in turn.

I have no disagreement whatsoever with the first point: that the working class is the class of the future, that the future must be guaranteed by building socialism and communism.

Point number two: while I agree that a socialist or communist future depends on the continuation of some form of "proletarian family," I am not at all sure what form the NSC is talking about. I will examine this for a moment.

As civilization develops and advances, new political forms arise and launch into conflict with the old. Currently we see the communist movement for socialism in savage battle with the old established form of capitalism.

As the conflict heightens, society changes, sometimes in small

gradual shiftings, sometimes in enormous quantum leaps; the changes build on one another and accelerate the rate of change until the old society has reached the utter peak of its development, until it can develop no further.

At critical points such as this, the only way for history to move forward is for the new developing political form to violently smash the old dying one, to cast it off as so much dust.

What is "proletarian family life"? Obviously, it is different under different economic systems. The capitalist "ideal" of proletarian family life is to have a man and a woman married, the man working, the woman sometimes working (for sexist low wages) and sometimes staying home and taking care of the house and children (which is also work, paid indirectly through the man's wages). A primary function of this family form under capitalism is to isolate women, to isolate children in their early years, ~~to~~ to create internal contradictions in men between isolation with their families and detachment from their families to achieve socializing. My analysis of family life under capitalism leaves much to be desired, but I think the picture I've given here is accurate as a generalization.

Under socialism or communism, both men and women would be paid directly for work, with no sexist wage differential. Child-raising would be a collective function, the responsibility would belong to the whole society. Family life would be stripped of the isolation necessary under capitalism.

"Proletarian family life" as we now know it does have positive aspects. It is (or can be) a source of stable relationships. It can be a source of calm and stability in our lives generally. Under socialism and communism we would guarantee the preservation of the positive qualities. But under capitalism these qualities are not the primary aspect of "proletarian family life," they are secondary. The negative qualities, the qualities that help uphold bourgeois capitalist culture, are currently primary.

If industrial production is to change under socialism, we must first smash all the old capitalist forms of production and production relations--we must get rid of bosses, centralized separate profit control, etc. If we are to have an effective people's army, we must first smash the structure of the old professional ~~xxx~~army, we must thoroughly dissolve the old army and assimilate it back into society. The same for education, sports, science, art, all the institutions of our world--if we are to install new socialist forms, we must first ruthlessly smash the old capitalist forms, wipe them from the earth.

Likewise, if we are to develop new forms of proletarian family life, we must first abandon and sweep away all old concepts of what proletarian family life is and should be. This will, of course, have many implications for child-raising, child-producing, relationships between men and women, human relationships in general.

However, so far as I can discern, the form of "proletarian family life" to which the NSC refers is a form with its basis in bourgeois capitalism. The NSC seems to have given no consideration at all to the political nature of all forms of family life. They seem to regard family life as a politically neutral form, and this is not the case.

Point number three: certainly the existence of "proletarian family life" of whatever form, and indeed the existence of society and culture as a whole, depend on at least some people having children. But does the existence of "proletarian family life" depend on everyone having children?

The answer is that it does under capitalism. But in a socialist or communist society, where the task of child-raising--a task central to ~~a~~ any form of family life--would be collectivized, it would no longer be necessary for everyone to have children, at least not in a purely ~~xx~~ scientific sense.

But--and this leads to the kernel of the question--if it is not necessary for everyone to have children, then on what basis do we decide for whom it is necessary to have children, and who need not have them? How do we decide this?

This brings us to point number four.

The NSC ~~xx~~ says that homosexuals, at least, make the decision to be homosexual (and therefore not to have children) because of bourgeois individualism.

~~THEXXXXX~~

I disagree.

The decision to have or not have children is often based on bourgeois individualism. But this is not because of the nature of having children. It is rather because of capitalism, the nature of capitalism--capitalism encourages bourgeois individualism in all aspects of our lives, including having children.

Under socialism or communism, the decision to have or not have children could, and perhaps should, be arrived at scientifically, ~~xx~~ collectively, after a period of principled struggle within a collective--much the same way "purely" political questions are struggled over within the Party now.

Likewise, the decision to become homosexual is often based on bourgeois individualism. But, again, this is not because of the nature of homosexuality. It is, rather, because of the nature of capitalism--capitalism encourages bourgeois individualism in all aspects of our lives, including decisions on sexual preference.

Under socialism or communism, decisions about sexual preference, and all sorts of decisions about human relationships, could, and perhaps should, be arrived at scientifically, after a period of principled struggle in a collective--much the same way "purely" political questions are struggled over within the Party now.

~~X~~ I will add that while I have here utterly rejected one theory put forward by the NSC as to why people decide to become homosexual, I still have not put forward any theory of my own on the question. This is because I don't know why people decide to become homosexual. This perhaps deserves more discussion in developing a line on homosexuality.

Point number five: I feel I have adequately refuted most of the essential elements of this point by now. But there is ~~X~~ one aspect I want to address further.

If (following for just a moment the NSC's logic) ~~it's~~ homosexuality is bad because it doesn't produce children (adding to the future of the working class), then it is reasonable to assume that any relationship that doesn't produce children is, by virtue of that fact, a bad relationship, bad because the decision not to

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have children is based on bourgeois individualism. Once again, even if we assume this is true, (and I don't), it is not because ~~xx~~ of the nature of having children, but because of the nature of capitalism.

I cannot defend the Party's current line on homosexuality, as stated by the NSC. I cannot defend it because I don't know how. I have been unable to find any scientific basis in the NSC statement for defending it.

Furthermore, if I have accurately perceived what the NSC says "proletarian family life" is, I cannot adequately put forward ~~af~~ or defend this conception of it. I cannot because I have found no scientific basis in the NSC statement for defending it.

And still further, if it is indeed the Party's line that all communists should have children, then I cannot defend this line either. I don't know how. I have found no scientific basis in the NSC statement for defending it.

I will add that besides not being able to defend any of these three positions, I also disagree with all three of them. This fact is secondary in the discussion, but I say it here to clearly state my position. It is not just a matter of my not being able to defend the line, although that is primary; I also disagree.

In order to develop a good line on homosexuality, we need to find scientific answers to at least two questions. (This may not be all there is to it, but it's a ~~xxx~~ start.)

1. What is homosexuality?

Some people believe that if two people of the same sex touch each other, that is homosexuality. Other people believe that only the most explicit homosexual acts constitute homosexuality. Still others believe it's possible to go through "phases" of having homosexual experiences and still not be really homosexual. There are yet other viewpoints. Certainly homosexuality can be scientifically defined, but we have not scientifically defined it.

(To give this some perspective--there is also a good deal of disagreement about what constitutes heterosexuality. Some people BELIEVE only penis-vagina intercourse is heterosexual; some people feel a man and woman holding hands is; others consider oral, anal, and other physical acts between a man and a woman to be heterosexual; etc. etc. etc.)

2. Why do some people become homosexual?

The NSC advanced a theory in their statement. I have given reasons why I think this theory has no basis. But the question still needs to be answered.

I will add one final note. In trying to defend the NSC's position, some comrades may turn to the history of other communist movements to see how they ~~xxx~~ dealt with the question of homosexuality. This is certainly valid and may indeed provide the answer. (For instance, I've heard somewhere that homosexuality virtually disappeared in China for a period of time immediately after the revolution.) The NSC gave no specific historical examples. I'd be interested to see something along these lines.

However, communist movements have been wrong in the past about

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many questions. Communist movements of the past, at least up to the Cultural Revolution in China, have been weak particularly in the area of struggling over culture and ideology. This category would certainly include the question of homosexuality.

I am naturally interested in any and all responses to what I've said here.

*a Party member from
Minneapolis*

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Some Reactions to the National Steering Committee Statement, "On the Party's Line on Homosexuality".

The National Steering Committee correctly says that we must judge the question of homosexuality from the perspective of the interests of the working class -- not from the perspective of any individual NOR from the perspective of bourgeois prejudice about homosexuality. Unfortunately, the statement does no such thing.

* We must evaluate any form of personal relationship, including sexual relationships, by the basic question: "Is it productive for the working class?" In other words, does this relationship create strength to carry on the struggle in the face of hardship; does it develop the individuals' ability to care about others, such that they will react stronger when their fellow workers are attacked; and so on. Basically: does this form of relationship advance the struggle for socialism? That is the correct criteria. An incorrect criteria would be, "does this relationship produce children?" Having children may be part of a productive sexual relationship, but it is hardly the main purpose of sexual relationships. This is a point well understood by the Party in its relationship with single people, with sterile people -- yet somehow things become different when we are discussing homosexuality.

It should be pointed out that people like having kids. Given the economic possibility of having kids, most people throughout history, throughout the world, do. In fact, a high percentage of 'homosexuals' have kids -- which shows how ridiculous it is to partition the world into 'homosexual' and 'heterosexual.' Sexuality is a continuum; most workers to whom the Party would deny entry on the grounds of homosexuality have lived and/or will live with someone of the opposite sex. When we talk about so-called 'homosexuals' what we usually mean is people who may have sexual relations with people of either sex. A good example of the attitude of 'homosexuals' towards kids: one of the biggest issues of lesbian rights has been the right of lesbian mothers to keep their children (the state harasses open lesbians by suing to take away their kids).

* When we discuss our attitude towards forms of sexual relationships, the phrase 'proletarian family' pops up. What is generally meant by 'proletarian family' is the kind of family life practiced (or held up as an ideal) by most workers today. Comrades, it is a serious error to pretend that we are fighting for a society which will be like the ideal held by most workers today. Workers under capitalism are subject to the pressures of bourgeois ideology; as Marx said, "The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class." Ideologies which now have a powerful grip on workers -- ideologies such as individualism, passivity, and sexism -- will be eliminated only through struggle, especially the struggle for socialism (a struggle which will continue after workers seize state power). We should not idealize the present-day working class. The present form of the family is bourgeois, based primarily on the oppression of women.

* The NSC statement omits any discussion of the form of sexual relationship that capitalism is now pushing -- that is, the commoditization of sex. Sexual relationships of a stable sort (lasting, loving) are being torn apart and replaced by sex as a commodity. Not only the tremendous growth in pornography and in prostitution, but also the encouragement of fleeting sexual relationships: the singles bar becomes the prototype. The enormous growth in single-person households reflects the discouragement of any lasting relationships among people. This is a very negative trend for the working class. Isolated individuals can not develop the kind of deep solidarity with the working class that is necessary to carry on the struggle. The Party should encourage all its members and friends to develop stable ties with fellow workers -- not only friendships, but also a stable sexual relationship with a fellow worker. This should apply to both homosexual and heterosexual relationships.

*The NSC statement says, "For every bigot like Bryant who condemns homosexuality from their class point of view, ten times as many bosses -- especially the main wing of the ruling class -- says its O.K." Comrades, really! Let us ask: are homosexuals oppressed in this society -- do known homosexuals face discrimination on the job, in housing, etc.? The answer is obviously, "yes." Then where does this oppression come from? Does it fall from the sky like rain? Does it come from the working class (since when did workers have the power to say how contemporary U.S. society is run?) NO -- it comes from the ruling class! Of course the ruling class "says its O.K." -- they also say they are anti-racist, they say they are watching out for the workers' best interests, they say many ridiculous lies. When the Supreme Court says that teachers may be fired from their jobs just for being homosexual -- is the Supreme Court suddenly not in the main wing of the ruling class?? The NSC statement tries to deny the class character of the oppression of homosexuals. As Marxist-Leninists, we should know that the nature of this society -- including its oppression of homosexuals -- is determined by its class character. The bourgeoisie tries to divide workers along whatever lines of prejudice it can.

* The NSC statement explains that the exclusion of homosexuals from the Party on the grounds that, "unlike other deviations of a political character, most homosexuals deny that it is a bad thing." This is a peculiar statement. There are many deviations of a political character where people deny that the deviation is a bad thing. Some of these deviations are so serious that the people concerned must be excluded from the Party; for instance, someone who thought that the Party is great, but the U.S.S.R. is basically a socialist country (that person would say his position is correct and the Party's is wrong -- in other words, he would deny that his deviation from the Party's line is a bad thing). Other deviations are not so serious and the people concerned can be let into the Party. In other words, there are secondary differences that we hope can be resolved over time. For instance, the Party has a policy to allow people who believe in God into the Party. These people certainly "deny that the deviation is a bad thing." (I could cite several people as examples). No matter what the Party's line on homosexuality, there would still be the question: is the position on homosexuality such an important question that disagreement on this question should keep someone out of the Party? I would say the answer is, "No" -- no one should be kept out of the Party because of their position on homosexuality, because homosexuality is a very secondary question.

* Lastly, we get to the question, "Where does homosexuality come from?" -- or rather, "Where does sexuality come from?" Frankly, I think we are here entering the realm of sheer speculation -- we simply don't have the experience from human relations in a non-exploitative society to tell. (The Bolsheviks had some very confused ideas on this. In spite of Lenin, the predominant attitude was summed up in the phrase, "having sex is like drinking a glass of water" -- purely a physical act. The Bolsheviks legalized homosexuality -- the struggle for homosexual rights had been part of their work, as it had been for all the major parties of the 2nd International. The laws on homosexuality, divorce, abortion, etc. were changed in the 1930's). It is fun to speculate, but we should recognize how little scientific content there is to our speculation. The Party should certainly not take a position on the origins of sexuality until there has been a great deal more work done on the question (and there is no reason for us to do that work now). The Party does not have a position on every question under the sun, nor should it. As for my speculations about the origins of sexuality -- I suspect that while the sexual drive is innate, the fixing of that drive is social. In other words, people learn to be 'heterosexual' or to 'homosexual' (misleading terms, because they imply an 'either-or' choice, where actually there is a continuum). There is no spot along the continuum which is more 'natural' than any other spot. My personal prejudice is to suspect that in a non-class society, most people would be somewhere in the middle.

----- Pat Clawson

The National Steering Committee tries to approach the question of homosexuality from a political and not an emotional point of view. This is an advance from the avoidance of homosexuals because they are "sick," "perverted," etc. However their letter fails to fulfill this intention, by substituting a series of prejudicial and unsupported statements for reasoned arguments in favor of their stand:

(1) "Homosexuality basically denies the future." Why? Because it implies lack of reproduction? Aside from the many homosexuals with children, fertility has never been a criterion for Party membership. Nobody suggests we all become homosexual, let the species die out, etc. And what exactly is the "proleterian family"? This point needs plenty of discussion; we would hope that socialism will entail major changes in the traditional family bequeathed to us by the bosses.

(2) "The main wing of the ruling class say it's O.K." Likewise for the equality of blacks== they "say it's O.K." The ruling class puts forward lines to appeal to all segments of the population, but it doesn't screw them any less for it though. The media "embrace" homosexuality in the same way they "embrace" the liberation of women, as a laugh, a cheap way to make vulgar sexual references. It is on the same level of autistic titillation as the glorification of "swinging" and of the decadence of the Roman Empire ("I, Claudius"); this no more implies the evil of homosexuality than the movement of organized extramarital promiscuity implies that heterosexuality is bankrupt. Gay bars for "cruising" represent the same perversion of sexuality as "singles bars" and stem from the same repressive decadence. The ruling class in practice (along with the KKK, Roar, etc.) oppress homosexuals in a way they don't dare do to the rest of the working class==yet. Only homosexuality and Communism are immediate, complete justifications for firing a person from a job.

(3) "We cannot equate attacks on homosexuals with serious attacks of the

working class." Obviously in comparison with, say, racism sexual oppression is a secondary not to say tertiary contradiction. But as revolutionary Communists we fight against every aspect of the oppression the ruling class visits on us, not just the "primary" ones.

(4) "Our Party will not accept the idea of 'do your own thing.'" This is setting up a straw man in a way that is not worthy of the NSC of our Party. Further, a letter arguing one side of an unresolved question that is being presented to the Party's members for discussion should not be signed, and should particularly not be signed by an official organ of the Party.

How important is the question of homosexuality to our Party? For one thing there are homosexuals around the Party now who could be better fighters for their class if they were not closed out—and many more excellent people who have kept far away from the Party because of its reputation for anti-homosexual bigotry. Contrary to the writer from Minneapolis, homosexuality is not "usually encountered in the context of oppression." Kinsey's study found that one of five women had lesbian contact by the time they were 40; 13% had experienced orgasm in these contacts (Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, p.454). Among men, more than one in three had at least one homosexual orgasm, one in five were as much homo- as heterosexual, and one of ten was exclusively homosexual (Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, p.650). This was in the 1940's, far more "repressed" times than our own. I for one have known many homosexual men and lesbians who are stable, good people and strong instinctive anti-capitalist fighters.

But this reason is secondary to the main one: that anti-homosexual attitudes are just another aspect of bourgeois mentality. In order to maintain the special oppression of women and disunity between the sexes in the working class, the bourgeoisie teaches the totally false dogma that some character traits belong innately to men and others to women. We are told that women are passive, soft, weak, intuitive, affectionate; men are strong, independent, capable,

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unfeeling. These stereotypes serve specific purposes for the ruling class and are correctly perceived by the Left as handicapping the human potential of both men and women as well as directly and indirectly sabotaging the revolutionary movement. We in PLP encourage leadership in women, sharing of household duties, etc. and we generally put forward that men and women have the same potentials and the same limitations.

Yet it is precisely from these stereotypes that the horror of homosexuality arises: men should be Men, women should be Women. In the sexist schema there is no worse insult for a woman than to be called aggressive, nor for a man to be called soft. "Aggressive" women then are put down as "dykish," and any man who refuses the oppressive, tower of strength role must get used to being called a "fag." The roots of the hatred of homosexuality is not that it is unnatural or decadent, but that its existence challenges and blurs the categories vital to a sexist society. In fact the most rabid anti-homosexuals are almost always the most unregenerate sexists, both in and out of the Party. I maintain that even those who disagree with my analysis of the nature of homosexuality must admit that at least a portion of the general attitude against it is generated by sexism.

Homosexuality is by its nature neither reactionary (as the NSC would have it) nor revolutionary (as the Nazis and segments of the Gay Lib movement say). As a means of fighting sexism it is individualistic and non-productive, but as a form of expressing affection it is, per se, neither. It is impossible to say from the vantage point of a sexist society how much of presentday homosexuality occurs in reaction to sexism, and how much is natural sexuality. We cannot predict that in a society where women are not oppressed, homosexuality will disappear—perhaps it will be more widespread, or bisexuality will be the rule.

Anti-homosexual ideas split the working class struggle in two ways. First, they isolate homosexuals in "closets," forcing them to keep important portions of their lives secret from friends and co-workers. Their constant terror of

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discovery and persecution not only sets them apart but encourages them to be politically conservative, to not rock the boat, to keep a low profile. Second, these ideas imply that homosexuals have more in common with each other than they do with their class brothers and sisters. This serves to reinforce the main danger of homosexuality: that by opting out of heterosexual relationships an individual also retire from all contact with the opposite sex==and thus from the nitty-gritty struggle against sexism. True to the capitalist tradition of providing a nationalist=type line for every oppressed group we now have "Gay Liberation," a middle=class movement which encourages homosexuals to have in homosexual circles, fight for homosexual rights, and let the "straights" fend for themselves. Some of these groups have an openly reactionary line and fight for representation of homosexuals among the ruling class, while others try for the more "left" line that homosexuality is the answer to sexism. It is easy to poke holes in both of these lines but we are in no position to do so until we offer working class homosexuals a proletarian alternative to Gay Liberation: a recognition of their very real oppression, and an analysis that encourages them to join with heterosexuals in the fight against the common enemy. After all the major attacks on the working class==unemployment, low wages, cuts in public services, etc.==affect all of us alike. I would propose to this end that

(1) Homosexuals should be recruited to the Party on the same basis as heterosexuals (i.e. on the basis of personal stability and willingness to work for the Party's line).

(2) Words like "fag" and "dyke" not only be eliminated from members' vocabulary but be criticized by us when we hear them used by others.

(3) The Party publically take the stand that laws discriminating against homosexuals are reactionary (this does not mean concentrating forces on this question)

(4) Party members debate the relationship between anti-homosexuality and sexism

==an NPW member, NYC

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"NICE WAYS OF DOING THINGS" VS. WASHING DOWN RACIST FILTH

During the week of Feb. 13, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held their convention in Wash. D.C. This association (about 160,000 members) is composed of scientists from all disciplines but is actually an organ the ruling class uses to push their ideas in the academic community. The executive council of this body, quite clearly, objectively (and, in most cases, subjectively) represents the racist, sexist, increasingly fascist interests of the U.S. ruling class. This is shown by the fact that last year the racists Jensen and Nathan Glazer were elected fellows of the AAAS by this executive council and this year the main "academic" topic at the convention ~~was~~ was the racist E.O. Wilson and sociobiology.

Among the allies of the ruling class at this convention was the group which calls itself "The Science for the 'People'". This was the only other group --other than PL and CAR-- which leafletted, sold literature, etc. consistently during the convention. This group is led by revisionists who put forward a non-militant, "Let's debate the racists" line and who have no desire to make ties with the working class or with minority students and professionals. Consequently, their group is an overwhelmingly white student and professional sect. While it may be possible to win some of their rank & file away from their liberal-revisionist line, this group is not a left group with which we should work or with which we should make ~~alliances~~ alliances. This is shown by the fact that Science for the "People" (the same ~~individuals~~ individuals who were at this convention) were attacked by CAR and PL in Boston for debating the ~~Nazis~~ Nazis and by the fact that they spent much of their time at the convention trying to keep us from being too ~~militant~~ militant.

Although the ruling bodies of the AAAS represent the ruling class, the rank & file in the AAAS is, for the most part in the center (or left of center): Many have been won to an anti-racist position as is shown by the fact that hundreds signed the CAR petition calling for Jensen's ouster as a AAAS fellow. The Party and CAR correctly ~~decided~~ decided that the convention would be a worthwhile place to spread revolutionary and anti-racist ideas.

To this end, PL and CAR members from D.C. and about a ~~half-dozen~~ half-dozen CAR people from around the country went to the convention. However, during this week, much confusion and much more disagreement about ~~what~~ what should be done developed -- including two lines: a right wing one and a left one! What happened?

PRIOR TO THE CONVENTION: CAR circulated an anti-racist, anti-Jensen petition which forced an open hearing at the convention on Monday, Feb. 13. On Jan. 7, at the CAR executive meeting in N.Y. it was decided that while D.C. CAR would be responsible for a CAR literature table, a national east coast CAR leader would be responsible for ~~coordinating~~ coordinating the activities inside the convention meetings, etc., to put forward CAR's line. He would find out who could come in for the convention and ~~plan~~ plan CAR activities for the week. (D.C. CAR was not represented at the N.Y. meeting, but was happy to guarantee a CAR table.)



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Monday, Feb. 13: CAR had forced the AAAS exec. council to hold an open hearing on (among other things) whether Jensen, who was given a AAAS fellowship last year, should be de-fellowized. With only a few hours mass work at the convention and because we built for this open hearing in D.C. ~~we~~ we were able to pack this open hearing with 40-50 people. We were able to force the exec council members holding this hearing to reopen Jensen's fellowship appointment and to have CAR speakers at Thurs. main exec. council meeting. This hearing was very sharp. No one spoke in favor of Jensen and all but one person who talked (not only us) called for Jensen's ouster as a fellow. When one woman (not one of us) demanded to know why the council had elected him a fellow, none of the council members present had the guts to defend themselves ~~or~~ or Jensen: they were too intimidated.

Tues. ~~March 14~~ We put out a "Statement on Sociobiology" in a mass way and found out that the racist E.O. Wilson was speaking at a workshop on sociobiology on Wed. afternoon. We decided to give him the "Racist, Sexist, Nazi of the Year" "award" at this workshop.

Wed.: CAR and PL people from D.C., with a CAR person from N.Y. and one from ~~Denver~~ Denver, presented the "award" before Wilson was able to speak in front of nearly 1,000 people. We called him a racist, sexist, Nazi pig and poured water on him saying that he was all wet. We chanted "Racist Wilson, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide" and gave a short talk (which the workshop leaders were forced to agree to) on ~~what~~ what CAR's line on Wilson and sociobiology is. We had leafletted the entire room with our position on Wilson so everyone knew who we were and where we were coming from.

Thurs.: We were able to keep the topic of Jensen's racist theories the topic of the AAAS exec. council meeting for two hours. CAR and PL people spoke militantly at least eight times calling for Jensen's ouster as a fellow. It was ~~the~~ the main topic at this exec. council meeting (However, only 4 members of the AAAS exec. council out of about 60 voted to oust Jensen).

#### ~~OUR~~ OUR WEAKNESSES AT THE AAAS CONVENTION:

1. We did not consistently sell PL literature all day every day at the convention (although we did sell over ~~\$10.~~ \$10. worth of PL literature).
2. There was no plan worked out prior to the convention by the east coast CAR leader who had taken responsibility for doing this. This resulted in much confusion.
3. This east coast CAR leader put forward the line at the Monday open hearing that the AAAS exec. council would be taken as racists if they didn't de-fellowize Jensen and somehow redeem themselves (instead of attacking the exec. council as the ruling class controled racists they are and pointing out that any anti-racist positions they take would have to be forced on them). The line was so bad that the ~~Science~~ "Science for the 'People'" creeps put out a leaflet endorsing CAR's position.
4. The "Statement on Sociobiology" which we put out starting Tues. morning was written before the convention (but typed on a mimeo late Monday nite) and was ~~weak~~ weak on the line (e.g. "we urge" instead of "we demand") and had nothing about CAR in the headline. When this was raised with the east coast CAR leader who had taken responsibility for the statement, he ~~said~~ said that info about CAR could be tacked on at the bottom (CAR's address and Phone number in N.Y.) When it was suggested that the headline read "CAR SAYS SMASH RACIST WILSON" (or something similar) he said that this after all was not a leaflet (what was it then?) ~~and~~ and he wanted "Statement on Sociobiology" (we changed this Tues. nite after he left).

5. This east coast CAR leader seriously suggested that D.C. CAR spend its time putting together CAR packets on Jensen, finding their addresses at the convention, and sending them to the over 60 exec. council members because "they might not know the issues about Jensen" (even though hundreds of other AAAS members did because they signed our petition against Jensen). ~~THIS~~ This CAR leader was finally able to persuade a AAAS staffer (who had originally suggested it to him) to send these CAR pamphlets to all the exec. council members.
6. Two CAR members (at least one of whom is a PL member) refused to participate in giving the "award" to Wilson on Wed. This was a serious breach of party discipline. When asked why they didn't participate they quoted this east coast CAR leader about "nice ways of doing things" *and about some sort of faulty exceptionalism!*
7. Although PL and CAR people from D.C. did ~~a~~ know that Wilson would be doused with water, people from outside D.C. did not know about it. I made the decision not to tell them for two reasons: A. When I arrived at the convention early wed. afternoon, a creep from Science for the 'People' rushed up to me demanding that we not disrupt the Wilson workshop by giving Wilson the 'award'. I didn't know then who had told these assholes what we were up to (I ~~found~~ found out later that the east coast CAR leader had told them on Tues., even though he knew that these jerks had been attacked by PL and CAR in Boston recently for debating the Nazis). B. When I arrived at the CAR table, CAR people from outside D.C. were literally yelling about whether or not to give the "award" even though they had been warned that hotel security guards had been watching us all week and even though there were lots of people around the CAR table. Not telling the CAR people from ~~out~~ out of town about the water was wrong. I should have told them and, in a comradely way, told them to ~~shut~~ *shut* up about it.
7. We were not prepared to sharpen the question & ~~answer~~ answer sessions before Wilson came up at the workshop on Wed. Although CAR people made statements we should have been sharper and more militant. And although we did give leaflets on Wilson & sociobiology to almost everyone who attended this workshop, we were not prepared to give an ~~anti-CAR~~ *anti-CAR* talk on Wilson when we took the stage.
8. When the east coast CAR leader called me on Thurs. evening to find out what had happened at Thurs. exec. council meeting, he told me that he didn't think that we should have poured water on Wilson because this made it a personal attack on him. Of Course it was a personal attack on this racist, sexist pig! --- That was the point!
9. We did not sign up any new CAR members at the convention (although this would have been an easy thing to do).

#### OUR STRENGTHS AT THE CONVENTION:

1. We literally flooded the convention with CAR literature (petitions, leaflets, Arrows, etc.) all day every day -- so much so that the Wash. Post was forced to report that anti-racist, anti-Wilson petitions were all over the place and that one of the main topics at the convention was whether Wilson's work was racist & sexist.
2. Most CAR & PL members put forward the correct line that the AAAS exec. council was our ~~class~~ class enemy (and therefore could not be "won" to an anti-racist position but had to be fought) and that the ~~Science for the "People"~~ "Science for the "People" racists were not our friends (and that therefore we should not spend out time trying to ~~win~~ win them as an organization by struggling with their leadership, telling them our plans, and attending their meetings at the convention).
3. ~~People~~ People came in to D.C. at great expense and inconvenience and spent lots of time talking to people, getting contacts (at least two contacts in D.C. appear promising) and generally building for the things CAR decided to build for.

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4. We were able to bring a sizable group of people to the hearing on Monday.
5. Most people were won to the idea that the Wed. & Thurs. CAR activities ~~should~~ should be very sharp and militant. The people we brought ~~to~~ to the "award" and a water ceremonies from our base in D.C. thought this was great (and one joined PL shortly afterward).
6. People at the convention clearly ~~saw~~ saw CAR as the leading force in the anti-racist movement because of our mass work and our actions at the Wed. workshop: people came up to us after the "award" and water presentation wanting to know more about us; when I returned to the convention site later that evening people were still rushing about asking each other what had happened, what they had seen, or ~~wishing~~ wishing that they had been there to see what had happened (a reporter from the San Fran. ~~Chronicle~~ Chronicle rushed up to me demanding an interview). We became the topic of conversation at the convention. A freelance writer from Australia did at least two stories on us for Australia press -- one on our activities at the convention and one a background on CAR; the Wash. Post has called CAR in D.C. wanting ~~to~~ to do a feature article on CAR and the Sunday New York Times (2/19) ran an editorial attacking our actions (without ~~mentioning~~ mentioning us by name).
7. One of the CAR people who refused to participate in the Wed. dousing and "award" defended us after it was over from the floor of the workshop and was applauded.

The lessons of our work at the convention are clear: Although CAR chapters need more political discussions so that the line of CAR (& PL) members is sharper, and although we have to take seriously planning these sorts of activities instead of reacting to events, we made tremendous headway at this convention in spreading and struggling with people ~~around~~ around anti-racist and revolutionary ideas. Look what we were able to accomplish with ~~virtually~~ virtually no advance ~~planning~~ planning and think what we will be able to accomplish if we continue to be bold and militant in the anti-racist and revolutionary actions we conduct at these types of conventions and especially on our campuses!!!!

I thought it would be useful to follow this article with the account of the convention by Science for the People. From that account, it is clear that SftP did denounce CAR, although they speak rather gingerly about it: "One of us rose at the end of Wilson's talk to dissociate ourselves from the CAR action." But it is also clear that they came to the convention to fight against Sociobiology. After reading their account, scientific workers and students might ask themselves again if there is any need for a radical organization of scientists and scientific students and workers, and if the Party has any program or ideas relevant to that movement. Certainly the leadership of SftP is by no means as right-wing as the SDS leadership of 1966 when PLP members went into SDS (or is that now thought of as a mistake?)

(Note added by JP)

# AAAS: Sociobiology on the Run

Jon Beckwith and Bob Lange

In early February, several members of Boston SftP made the great escape from the snowbound city to attend the Washington AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science). There we met with several other SftPers from Amherst, Ann Arbor, Stony Brook, Seattle, D.C., and Urbana. The meeting was very successful — in more ways than one.

First, it was good — as always — to link up with other SftP folk. We talked about what our respective chapters were doing, the Western and Midwestern Regional Conferences, revitalizing the IDB, the magazine, and plans for a national SftP conference in Ann Arbor this coming December.

Every evening there were planning/evaluation meetings for AAAS activities. The first day we targeted the session on Agriculture and Malnutrition in Latin America where we were able to bring up several important points and considerably enlivened the session. Most energy in the following days was focused on sociobiology symposiums. SftP did well on the floor, raising points, challenging speakers, etc. and many people attended our countersessions. All in all, people felt like we put in a good showing and influenced a lot of people.

A literature table was staffed every day from 8:30-6 pm where we sold a lot of our materials, talked to a lot of people and made new contacts. Hopefully this will strengthen and expand the D.C. chapter as well as our national membership. There was also a spontaneous performance of *Laboratory!* which was well-received.

We felt good about going to AAAS. We learned a lot from it, made a lot of contacts, hopefully got some people thinking. □

"They (social scientists), and most biologists, find that Wilson took all too much license, in the last chapter of his book, in trying to explain human behavior. He resurrected the nature-nurture issue in a way which ignores the conceptual advances of the last 20 years..." Is this an excerpt from the latest broadside from Science for the People against E.O. Wilson, author of *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis?* Hardly! In fact, it is a quote from the official abstract for the recent two-day AAAS symposium on Sociobiology — an abstract written by one of the organizers of the symposium, George Barlow, who considers himself a sociobiologist. This is just one indication of a growing reaction within the academic community against the claims of Wilson and others concerning a genetic basis for human social behavior and institutions.

While the initial reaction nearly three years ago to Wilson's book was universally positive, this was broken with the publication of a letter from the Sociobiology Study

Group of Science for the People in November of 1975 in the *New York Review of Books*. In that letter we exposed the lack of scientific foundation for the sociobiologists' claims concerning human behavior and the political function of this and other biological determinist theories. Our letter opened up an often acrimonious debate which reached an important stage at the AAAS symposium this February, in Washington, D.C.

The very fact of the AAAS sponsoring this symposium on the "controversy" is an indication of the success we have had in making the claims of the sociobiologists controversial. What caught many of us in Science for the People by surprise at the AAAS meetings was the extent of the spreading negative reaction to sociobiology. At this meeting, and at another recent meeting in which we participated at Wellesley College, sociobiologists seemed very much on the defensive. Many have rushed to dissociate themselves from Wilson. At the AAAS meetings, the discrediting of

human sociobiology was reflected in the content of the symposium itself, in numerous private and public discussions which Science for the People held with those attending the meetings and in the receptivity to our ideas and literature.

The symposium itself was divided into two morning and two afternoon sessions with about five speakers at each session and question periods following the talks. Of the approximately 20 speakers, about six were directly critical of sociobiology, with several of them, including Steve Gould, Eleanor Leacock and Stephanie Shields, expressing also the political implications. A few, David Barash, Steven Emlen and Wilson, spoke on human behavior. Most of the rest restricted themselves to rather neutral sounding animal studies. We raised many questions from the floor during the sessions, trying particularly to get people to focus on the political implications of sociobiology and the way it had already been presented in the popular media and the schools.

At the same time, we got the

organizers to agree to let us use the symposium room for our own sessions which were held in the period between the morning and afternoon sessions. At one of these, we showed "Sociobiology: Doing What Comes Naturally," a film for high school and college students which includes interviews with sociobiologists Wilson, DeVore and Trivers, and is a blatant example of the way in which these ideas are used to support the status quo. (See Tedd Judd's review of the film in the last issue of *Science for the People*). Several hundred people attended and a good discussion followed. Both the Ann Arbor SftP group and the Boston Sociobiology Study Group brought to the meetings articles they had written on various aspects of sociobiology. We sold nearly a thousand copies of these articles.

The high drama of the meetings came on Wednesday afternoon, when the center of the controversy, E.O. Wilson, was to speak. The session began with a beautiful critique by SftP member Steve Gould, who spent some time demolishing a study by David Barash, an ardent sociobiologist who was the next speaker. (Barash is the author of one of the most outrageous works in the field — *Sociobiology and Behavior* — an Elsevier

paperback which is widely used in college courses.) Gould's talk received the largest ovation of the symposium. After Barash's rather lame presentation, Eleanor Leacock, an anthropologist, tore into Wilson's claims, citing much anthropological and other evidence. She also exposed and demolished the shoddy logic leading to some of the blatantly sexist assertions found in Barash's book. At this point in the symposium, as Wilson was introduced as the next speaker, the tide seemed more than ever against him and his followers.

He was about to begin his talk when a group of 10-15 members of Committee Against Racism (CAR) marched onto the stage, yelled "Racist Wilson you can't hide, we charge you with genocide," and poured water over Wilson's head. After a few minutes of confusion, and screaming both from CAR members and the audience, the former left the room and the moderator decried the incident, whereupon a large segment of the audience gave Wilson a standing ovation. He then proceeded to give one of the more outrageous and superficial of his speeches, attempting to claim that a large number of studies supported his claims for a genetic basis for human social behavior.

One of us rose at the end of Wilson's talk to dissociate ourselves from the CAR action. Unfortunately, the atmosphere created by the CAR attack on him made it difficult to immediately challenge the downright distortions and exaggerations in his talk. However, in the final discussion period, we were able to continue our politicizing questions and criticisms.

While our general feeling was that the anti-Wilson-Sociobiology sentiments were not seriously diminished by the CAR action, it did provide Wilson with at least a momentary respite from the criticisms and restored some respect to his position. Furthermore, the press coverage of the opposition to sociobiology focussed excessively on this incident; Science for the People must develop ways of reaching the press to get coverage of our positions and actions, in spite of the occurrence of such distractions.

We feel that the trend that the sociobiology debate is taking is a clear victory for Science for the People. Large numbers of people have been alerted to the fallacies and dangers of these theories and many outside of SftP are joining the critics. It may well be that human sociobiology is in some disrepute in the academic community. However, and this is extremely important, the academic refutations of these ideas do not prevent them from continually being presented in the popular media and school texts. Recent examples are the August 1, 1977 cover story of *Time* magazine on Sociobiology, "Why You Do What You Do," and an article in the March, 1978 issue of *Psychology Today* by David Barash. The struggle must be continued, for history teaches us that biological determinist ideas from eugenics to Jensenism can have powerful social impact and must be combatted both in the academic and public arenas. □



#### SOCIOBIOLOGY LITERATURE

Available from Science for the People

*Biology as a Social Weapon*, ed. by Ann Arbor Science for the People, Burgess, Minneapolis, 1977. \$5.00

**Critique of Sociobiology Packet** Total \$2.00

The packet is composed of various articles and reprints written by members of the Sociobiology Study Group of Boston Science for the People. Articles also available individually.

—"Sociobiology: A New Biological Determinism," by Sociobiology Study Group, in *Biology as a Social Weapon*. 50 cents

—*Sociobiology: The New Magic Box*, by Sociobiology Study Group. 50 cents

—*A Methodological Critique of Sociobiology*, by J. Alper and H. Inouye, in *Philosophical Forum* (in press). 30 cents

—*Sociobiology is a Political Issue*, by J. Alper, J. Beckwith and L. Miller. From *The Sociobiology Debate*, ed. by A. Caplan, 1978. 30 cents

—*The Ethical and Social Implications of Sociobiology*, by J. Alper. To appear in a book published from the proceedings of the AAAS symposium on Sociobiology — San Francisco, June 1977. 1978 30 cents

"The New Sexist Synthesis," by B. Chasin, and "Are Sex Roles Biologically Determined?" by F. Salzman. Reprinted from *Science for the People* magazines. 30 cents